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Paul to Jim, 2 July 1963

Paul M. Gaston

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29 Aug. Shocked to see I never mailed this! Called you
in Atlanta but heard
you were in hospital. Hope
the back is all right
Now. Leave for
Baltimore tomorrow. D



Corcoran Department of History

B-20 CABELL HALL

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

CHARLOTTESVILLE

2 July 1963

Dear Jim:

I am flattered to be included in the list of those who might have been thanked for contributing to the excellence of your presidential address. It is a tough problem, in many ways, but I am anxious to see what you do with it, for I know it will be good. For reasons which will appear below, I have not had a moment to think about your problem and without some sustained thought I can't come up with anything beyond the most obvious factors which you already -- long since -- have taken into account. Perhaps later in the summer, when I'm lying on the beach of Mobile Bay, I'll be able to put my mind to it.

I went to a Dewey "learn by doing" school in my youth and, after concluding my lectures on the present South in May, I decided to engage in a little doing: it started as a small sit-in movement at one of the local restaurants, grew to include a dozen faculty members and their wives and a handful of students (it was examination time) and some fifty or more Negroes. We won victories every day in the first four or five (largely through negotiations with the threat of an imminent sit-in): movie houses, restaurants, snack bars. One restaurant -- "Buddy's" -- was recalcitrant, however, and our efforts focused on it. By the third day we were locked out and remained standing in a line on the sidewalk leading to the door, while a bouncer guarded the entrance and permitted entry to "acceptable" customers.

I thought about you that Memorial Day afternoon when all the action started. I was standing "out" at about one when two busloads of Mississippi school children arrived and happily paraded by us to patronize Buddy's. Not a one of them showed any signs of hesitation. A large number seemed delighted. Later in the afternoon four pretty well oiled town toughs (one weighing 325 lbs!) showed up to apprise us of our sins. I happened to be "captain" of the line at that particular moment (almost by accident, ironically) and when our friends began to shove us I walked across the street to a phone booth to ask the local constabulary for assistance. This ambition ran counter to the desires of our friends, as I soon learned: The 325 pound lad, a former prize fighter ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ removed me with ease from the booth, informing me that "You ain't gonna call no damn cops!" It was at this point that a confederate of the large man slapped me across the face and punched me a couple of times on the mouth (bringing forth hero's blood). My allies stood across the street, dutifully nonviolent, and I recalled our instructions to offer no resistance (which I had originally thought superfluous: no trouble could ever occur in Charlottesville) - and this philosophical injunction seemed to coincide

with common sense, confronted (as I was) by men who were clearly my betters in matters of violence. My nonviolence seemed to irritate them considerably, but I was shortly released to the custody of my nigger-lovin' friends while my assailants returned to the Cavalier Cavern for more beer. The police finally got called, identified the men at the Cavalier, and instructed me in the manner of swearing out a warrant for their arrest. While I was at the police station the same men returned, this time beating two Negroes in the line, one of them almost unmercifully.

(Incidentally, the local press reported that the "Buddy's Incident" saw the first violence in racial matters in Virginia. If true, and I have had the fact verified by one veteran reporter, I am the proud recipient of the first blow struck in the Old Dominion!)

Messrs. Henley and Cowgill, our assailants, both had police records and both seemed well versed in matters of the law. For every warrant we swore out against them, they swore out one against us. I had not known that warrants can be so easily sworn out, and with so little chance of running a risk. Apparently the notion is that the best defense is an offense and by the time their lawyer offered to make a deal: they would soft pedal their charges if I would soft pedal mine -- I was prepared to decline, without seeming surprised that the offer had been made.

The trial was a great affair, drawing overflow crowds. It lasted a day and a half, as I munched on stomach pills and wondered what that segregationist judge was thinking. A weird kind of justice prevailed in the end: Johnson, Johnson, and Gaston (the "demonstrators") were acquitted; Henley and Cowgill were found guilty on all counts, given 30-day suspended jail sentences and fined \$10! As one of their cohorts remarked to a Negro on leaving the court: "Hell, it only costs \$10 to hit one of you fellows!" The judge was apparently disappointed that we had done nothing illegal, but he used the occasion to express his disapproval of sit-ins.

For a long time I had said that integrationist activity in Charlottesville could be carried on without fear of retaliations of any sort. I was wrong. Two days after the ~~xxx~~ "incident" my tires (all four of them) were slashed by a student - a member of a neo-Nazi group that has just begun around here. Through clever ~~xxx~~ detective work, Tom Hammond ~~xx~~ worked out his identity and he has just appeared before a faculty committee--where he explained that he had nothing personal against me (in fact, didn't even know me) but that he was acting on "principle." The committee found this a strange principle on which to act and expelled the boy... Nuisance calls persisted for ten days or so, but have now died out.

I quite realize that low-keyed affairs of this sort will scarcely make an impression on someone accustomed to the problems of James Meredith and ~~xxxxx~~ Medgar Evers but, along with the more spectacular affairs in Danville, it helps to shatter the image of a decorous and dignified Virginia.....I hope you will be cheered to learn that faculty support has been extraordinary; that I got applause from my Southern History class (the day after the incident, when I gave my examination); and that the Administration was, if not elated, at
~~xxxxx~~

least extremely anxious to see me acquitted (helping to select a lawyer) and extraordinarily concerned that no one should think I was being criticized or put on the carpet. I have no complaints on that score.

Our little bit of direct action shook things up in the community: we got a large number of restaurants (plus two of three theatres) desegregated; and finally got the appointment of a mayor's bi-racial commission which has just announced that downtown department stores have agreed to drop racial bars in employment practices. Buddy, of Buddy's, remains adamant. Widely known as a fine, Christian gentleman (If you've ever eaten there you may have noticed the Norman Vincent Peale-type mottoes), Buddy has become something of a hero to the segregationist element for his determined stand to uphold principle ~~and~~ against the forces of lawless agitation.

For ~~my~~ part I'm not anxious to participate in more demonstrations; work suffers and my constitution is not designed for the constant tension.....So, Mary and I both look forward to being away next year where I can concentrate exclusively on scholarly matters. Don't know if I told you, but I'll be on leave, teaching two courses at Hopkins. We've rented a furnished place, which we'll occupy on 1 September and we expect to return here in June. Except for the last two weeks in July, when we'll be with my folks in Alabama, we'll be here for the remainder of the summer.

Love to Dutch.

We Shall Overcome.

Paul (Easton)